2: Hockings E-4,5 (1962-1977) 1980
AW50 Badaga AW50

159 691 692 Kallan was apparently willing to accept this, for he was now urging Nandi to repay the supposed loan but under no circumstances to go to a lawcourt. Now it is up to Nandi to solve the problem, still at stalemate in 1975. The solution which he chooses must be couched in the current ambilegal idiom. If he attempts a solution purely in the traditional idiom or purely in the lawcourt idiom, without taking into account the alternate system and Kallan's possible manipulation of it, then Nandi's chances of ultimate success are slim.

The point which the case of Kallan and Nandi underlines is that the introduction of British procedural law in the nineteenth century did not simply offer Badagas an alternative or more effective approach for solving conflicts in their community. The procedure in a lawcourt must have seemed capricious to a villager: it operated on the assumption that all individuals were equal before the law and that the proceedings must work directly towards a just decision; whether a man was a Torea or a member of the gentry was irrelevant to how he would be treated; his past history and his family's reputation were similarly not taken into consideration. To Kallan and Nandi, therefore, as to many of their Badaga contemporaries, the lawcourt is less a mechanism for dispensing impartial justice than a possible means of revenge and a process for overcoming one's opponent (regardless of who may actually be in the right). The use of a lawcourt can involve an 691 692 opponent in crippling legal costs, and the prospect of these costs may frighten him into compliance with what is wanted of him. 518 Threatening to go to a lawcourt after receiving unfavourable treatment from the village council can also be used to undermine the authority of the elders and cast aspersions upon the village's respectability. For over a century Badagas have had a saying that runs: 'If you prefer a complaint to a magistrate, it is as if you had put poison into your adversary's food' (Metz, 1864, 92; Grigg, 1880, 224). The belief is still voiced today; but in the interim Badagas have learned how to apply the poison effectively.

POLITICAL CHOICE

● 616 For the past five decades Badagas have been elected to seats in the state legislature, and for the past three there have been Badaga Members of Parliament. In recent years (as an effect of earlier

2: Hockings E-4,5 (1962-1977) 1980
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reversals) the Congress Election Board and some other parties have been careful to choose candidates who were Badagas, since this is the preponderant community in the Nilgiris. Until 1967 the electorate was clearly more interested in the candidate than his party's platform; but in 1967 this preference was reversed, owing to opposition party propaganda and the failure of earlier Congress representatives to satisfy educated young Badagas.

The first Badaga to enter provincial politics was H.B. Ari Gowder, a university-educated Gauda. His village was close to the European towns of Wellington and Coonoor, and his father (a former cowherd) was involved in lucrative construction work on the railway. Ari served for three terms as a member of the Madras Legislative Council before the Second World War and then had three terms in the Madras Legislative Assembly. He was defeated by a Congress candidate in 1946, but in 1952–1957 had another term as an Independent M.L.A. In his early political career he was an Independent but with leanings towards the Justice Party (which tended to support British rule and oppose the dominance of the provincial administration by Brahmins); and ever after he remained an Independent, despite a general sympathy among Badagas for the Congress movement. This man clearly achieved much political influence and perhaps charisma by entering public life in 1924 and capitalizing on the wealth and popularity of his father. Up to his death in 1971 he was undoubtedly more powerful among Badagas than their paramount chief.[19]

As Diagram 9 indicates, Ari Gowder's relatives followed him into the political arena. In the 1957 elections for the State Assembly his sister's husband was elected, and in 1962 the Communist candidate was his nephew; in the same year his brother's wife, the first Badaga woman to graduate, ran for Parliament on the Congress Party ticket and was elected. In 1967 she was defeated by a former Congressman, a well-educated Gauda from the Ke:ti area who represented the rightist Swatantra Party—the first time since Independence that a winning Badaga candidate was from a party other than Congress. In the State Assembly election of that year Congress also lost to an Independent and a D.M.K. (Dravidian Progressive) candidate (both Badagas). As a result the national Congress government, which the electorate held responsible for the poor rice ration, has been trying to regain favour with Badaga voters by locating in the Nilgiris during the later 1960s a German agricultural project, a

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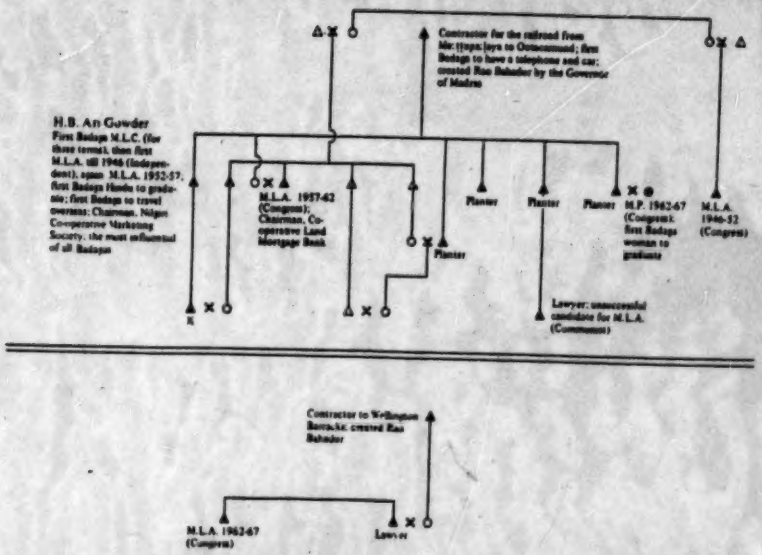

Diagram 9. The corridors of power

[p. 179]

In the course of the year almost every village celebrates a dozen or so festivals, the most important of which are concerned with the agricultural cycle: *doḍḍa habba*, the Great Festival, which marks the beginning of the agricultural year in November, and *de:va habba*, the God Festival, which celebrates the harvest in July. Another festival, called *Ma:ri habba*, intended to keep smallpox away, is celebrated in a few villages by fire-walking, when selected men walk unscathed across glowing embers. There are many other lesser ceremonies marking certain transitions in the lives of members of the community. For Badagas the major events of life are the naming of a child, its first haircut, the first milking of a cow, marriage, and death. On rare occasions some villages held a huge memorial ceremony in honour of a whole generation of the dead when its last member had passed away, but the ceremony was last performed in 1936. Yet many customs and celebrations of the Badagas are still observed today, in spite of dramatic changes which have affected other parts of their lives.

They are, for example, still led by a paramount chief whose position is hereditary and who always belongs to the village of Tu:ne:ri. (The latest chief was installed in 1977.) The political power devolves from this paramount chief to the headman of each village. In between them there are many local and regional headmen: several neighbouring villages make up a commune and, taking the name of the leading village, come under the authority of that village's headman. Above these there are also four regional chiefs who each control the villages and communes within their quarter of the Nilgiris.

Each headman has his own traditional council. A commune headman has the local village headmen in his council; a regional headman has the commune chiefs in his; and the paramount chief's council (which rarely meets) is composed of all the Badaga headmen. The judicial authority of all of these councils has been much diminished by the gradual imposition of Indian law and lawcourts. The traditional legal procedure for any dispute begins at the village level and then ascends through the various councils until finally an appeal may be considered by the paramount chief. In the past, headmen could impose severe punishments which ranged from ostracism to hanging, but today all criminal offences come under the authority of lawcourts, and village headmen and councils are left to deal only with minor disputes and ceremonial duties.

The Badagas are divided socially into a number of hierarchical